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# Image of the Wehrmacht in Federal German Society and in the Tradition of the Bundeswehr / Occasional Paper #3

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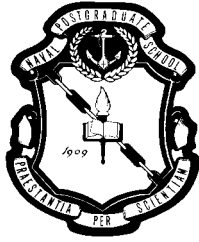
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**THE CENTER FOR  
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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**Occasional Paper #3**

**Image of the Wehrmacht in  
Federal German Society and in  
the Tradition of the Bundeswehr**

**Donald Abenheim  
August 1999**

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense of the United States Government.

## **The Center for Civil-Military Relations**

The Center for Civil-Military Relations at the Naval Post-Graduate School (CCMR, Monterey, CA) is an implementing organization of the U.S. Department of Defense's Expanded-International Military Education and Training Program and has amassed both scholarly and practical expertise educating civilian and military defense professionals from more than 40 countries. CCMR was established in 1994 and is sponsored by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA). CCMR conducts civil-military relations programs designed primarily for military officers, civilian officials, legislators, and non-government personnel. These programs include courses designed to be taught both in residence at NPS and in a Mobile Education Team (MET) format, depending upon requirements. Three programs offered by CCMR include the MET, the Masters Degree in International Security and Civil-Military Relations, and the Executive Program in Civil-Military Relations.

## Donald Abenheim

Born in San Francisco on 9 April 1953, Abenheim received his A.B. in German Studies (1975) and his Ph.D. in Modern European History (1985) at Stanford University. From 1981 until 1984 he served as a civilian liaison from U.S. Army, Europe to the German armed forces. He became a professor of strategy at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey in 1985, and Visiting Scholar at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University in 1987. He is also affiliated with the Stanford University International Relations program. His ongoing labor at both locales addresses the past, present and future of nationalism and war in Europe, as well as strategic studies generally.

He is the author of *Reforging the Iron Cross* (Princeton, 1989) and *Bundeswehr und Tradition* (Munich, 1989), two studies of German military professionalism and democracy from 1945 until the late 1980s. At present he is preparing a monograph on the German military since unification, as well as a text on the character and evolution of German foreign and defense policy in NATO. Since 1989, Abenheim has been a consultant to the National Security Council, the Office of Secretary of Defense, the Chief of Naval Operations, and the Deputy Chief of Staff of Operations and Plans, U.S. Army. In 1992, he served on temporary duty in the U.S. Mission to NATO. He works closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense of the Federal Republic of Germany on Atlantic security.

Since 1993 he has been Regional Program Manager for Europe at the Center for Civil-Military Relations. This program provides executive education in pluralistic civil-military affairs in such emerging democracies as Czech Republic, Poland, Slovak Republic, and Hungary within the overall goals of NATO's "Partnership for Peace." This effort has become a prominent feature of U.S. bilateral relations with central and eastern European countries. Abenheim has organized numerous civil-military seminars in these countries and maintains a steady liaison with the ministries of defense in central Europe, with officials in NATO and with the U.S. Department of Defense and Department of State.

# Image of the Wehrmacht in Federal German Society and in the Tradition of the Bundeswehr<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet civil-military system in 1989-91 has led to the enlargement of Euro-Atlantic democratic civil-military relations and military professionalism into central and eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> Since 1990, this process has featured prominently in the reform of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, whose “Partnership for Peace” has emphasized the need to place political ideals of security, defense and military service on a democratic footing in the sphere beyond the Elbe, Danube, Moldau and Vistula. Many participants in, and observers of, this process have tended to treat these events as *sui generis*, that is, as essentially being without precedent. While the details and certain key aspects of how the central and eastern Europeans have junked the Soviet system of civil-military relations have been surely unique, the collapse of regimes and the re-orientation of civil-military fundamentals recalls how episodes of military reform have unfolded in the European past. Since Niccolo Machiavelli’s proposals in

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<sup>1</sup> The research for this essay was generously supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development, whom this author wishes to thank. The views expressed here are solely those of the author and do not represent those of the U.S. Government.

<sup>2</sup> See: NATO Office of Information and Press, eds. *NATO Handbook: 50th Anniversary ed.* (Brussels, 1998), pp. 59ff; Jeffrey Simon, *NATO Enlargement and Central Europe: A Study in Civil-Military Relations*, (Washington, 1996); Donald Abenheim, “The German Soldier and National Unity,” in *After the Wall: Eastern Germany since 1989*, Patricia J. Smith ed. (Boulder/Oxford, 1998), pp. 257-279.

the fifteenth century to re-organize the army of Florence, military reform has been more or less a constant feature of modern European history.<sup>3</sup>

No where has this generalization been more true than in the record of the soldier and the state in Prussian-German history.<sup>4</sup> Such reforms began with the Hohenzollern Great Elector's reform of the Prussian army in the wake of the Thirty Years' War and continued through three centuries until German unification in 1990. However, the fate of German soldiers in the wake of defeat in 1918, the union of such soldiers and national socialism and the impact of the Second World War upon German society remain especially prominent in this respect.<sup>5</sup> The fate of the soldier in state in the era 1914-45 has formed an object of civil-military debate in German society from war's end in 1918-19 until this writing in the final months of the 20th century.

The present work concentrates on an aspect of the above, namely the manner in which the citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany have dealt with the symbolic and professional legacies of defeat in the past half century. This misunderstood subject commends itself to further reflection and analysis in an

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, see Hans Delbrueck, Die Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte, 4 vols. (Berlin, 1920ff.); Michael Howard, War in European History (Oxford, 1976); Peter Paret, Clausewitz and the State (New York/Oxford, 1976); John L. Lynn, ed. Tools of War: Instruments: Ideas and Institutions, 1400-1871 (Urbana/Chicago, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> See: Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (New York/Oxford, 1964); Gerhard Papke, et al eds. Handbuch zur deutschen Militaergeschichte, 1648-1939, 6vols. (Munich, 1979); Karl Volker Neugebauer, ed. Gruendzuege der deutschen Militaergeschichte, 2 vols. (Freiburg, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Among a vast literature, see, for instance: Hans-Juergen Mueller, Das Heer und Hitler: Armee und NS Regime, 2d. ed. (Munich, 1988); Omer Bartov, Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the 3d Reich (Oxford/New York, 1991); Hans-Guenther Thiele, ed. Die Wehrmachtausstellung: Dokumentation einer Kontroverse (Bremen, 1997); Heribert Prantl, ed. Wehrmachtsverbrechen: eine deutsche Kontroverse (Hamburg, 1997); Hans Poeppel, et al. eds. Die Soldaten der Wehrmacht (Munich, 1998); Militaergeschichtliches Forschungsamt eds. Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realitaet (Munich, 1999). A

English-speaking world, which remains more transfixed upon the causes and course of the two world wars than on their effects on the latter half of the century. This story also suggests itself to students of civil-military reform across the face of the globe interested in the impact of images of the past upon contemporary civil-military debate since all must to some degree deal with the legacies of the past in which the images of the armed forces are often extremely politicized.

In view of the long and fundamental importance of the military in Germany, its entry into war and defeat twice in the century under very different situations in civil-military relations, and the long and ongoing debate about the position of the military in society, there should be conclusions or “lessons” that are relevant for most new democracies. While we are indeed aware that all countries have unique challenges and thus the responses must also be unique, the case of how Germany deals with its military legacy, and particularly the definition of the professional soldier, is so rich and complex that we are convinced that scholars and decision makers throughout the world will find much of relevance in the pages that follow. The mere fact that there is a debate in Germany may encourage others to also debate their military legacies which in many cases are publicly ignored to fester until a political crisis brings them to a head, often with disastrous results.

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journalistic treatment of the soldier in national socialism is from a television series, Guido Knopp et al, Hitlers Krieger (Munich, 1998).



The unexpected success of democracy in Germany over the past half century has had an important civil-military component that is often overlooked by those unfamiliar with German politics and society since 1949. This civil-military aspect is reflected in how political and cultural elites in the FRG have thought about and acted upon the respective experiences of Germany's bid for world power, its defeat in 1918, the failed republic, the Nazi regime, and yet another, more horrible lost war. This process is closely linked to the idea of "coming to grips with the past," that is, the ethical, cultural, and above all intellectual-political reflection about past events and how such thought manifests itself in civil-military institutions and policy. The following pages interpret a little known debate within Germany about the nature of military professionalism and democracy in the wake of defeat, the rise of the Cold War, and the changing international and domestic-political aspects of Federal German civil-military relations.

### **Old Photographs And Old Questions Posed Anew**

What images of word and film best capture the legacy of the Wehrmacht (German armed forces) in the Federal Republic? Is it the amputee in a dyed field blouse and cap making his way on crutches amid the rubble?<sup>6</sup> Could it be scenes circa 1946 of the senior military leadership on trial at Nuremberg?; or, of the last

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<sup>6</sup> See: Klaus Honnef et al eds. *Ende und Anfang: Photographen in Deutschland um 1945* (Berlin, 1995); Dagmar Barnouw, *Germany, 1945: Views of War and Violence* (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 1996); Karl Hoche, *In diesem unserem Haus: eine Geschichte der Bundesrepublik in ihren Bildern* (Duesseldorf/Zuerich, 1996).

prisoners of war returning to Germany after their release from Soviet camps in 1955?; or the novelist Hans-Hellmut Kirst's depiction of barracks square brutality and farce in the novels *Null Acht Fuenfzehn?*; or of the dramatist Carl Zuckmayer's portrait of the air ace Ernst Udet's undoing in *Des Teufels General?* Perhaps, some would choose the thrilling depictions of soldierly bravery and the technical mastery of the military art with Stukas on high and Panthers on the attack found in the illustrated veterans' magazine, *Der Frontsoldat Erzaehlt?*

While any one of these images might offer a point of departure, this essay begins with a reflection on a collection of photographs from the Second World War that, in the present decade, has aroused bitter emotions in contemporary politics.<sup>7</sup> A studio portrait of an un-named young German soldier in his walking-out uniform contrasts with snap-shots of an execution somewhere in the rear area of the eastern front. In the former image, a young man in peaked cap and walking-out dress fixes his gaze purposefully beyond the portrait camera's lens. The second image reveals a group of German military and non-military personnel, as well as Russian civilians, transfixed by the shattered corpses that swing from the hangman's noose. The juxtaposition of images confronts the present with the dilemma of how German soldiers did or did not cross the ethical and professional frontier that separates a disciplined, regular army from becoming perpetrators of mass slaughter for genocidal purposes. The storm of

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<sup>7</sup> Hanes Heer et al eds. *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht, 1941-1944* (Hamburg, 1995), pp. xiv-xv. This is the edition of essays to supplement the catalogue of the Wehrmacht exhibition staged by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research. This exhibition became a source of civil-military controversy after 1995.

ideological mass violence that swept this recruit from the photo atelier to the front and which, in all likelihood, brought death to him and to the victims of the executioner has left behind great wreckage to the present day. The after-effects of this tempest have compelled those who survived as well as their heirs to consider the dilemma of how the second German democracy dealt with the legacy of national socialism and how the Federal Republic sought to reconcile military professionalism with the disasters of mass politics and the soldierly ethos. The debate that began in the mid-1990s about the so-called Wehrmacht exhibition represents the most recent episode in a long-standing process of coming to grips with the past as concerns these issues.<sup>8</sup> At various times since 1949, civilians and soldiers have addressed the image of the Wehrmacht in Federal German society in connection with the transformation of the international system of states and the changing complexion of domestic society. In particular, the debate about the valid heritage of the Bundeswehr (Federal German Armed Forces) forms but a subsidiary phenomenon of a general political and social self-examination of the past in German society that has burst forth with new energy since the European collapse of the communist system a decade ago.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See sources on exhibition also in note 5, above.

<sup>9</sup> See two German works: Ulrich Brochhagen, Nach Nuremberg: Vergangenheitsbewältigung und Westintegration in der Ära Adenauer (Hamburg, 1994); Norbert Frei, Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS Vergangenheit (Munich, 1996). On the general issue of society, culture, mentality and the legacy of war, see: Hermann Glaser, Kulturgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 3 vols. (Munich/Vienna, 1985); on these issues in society, politics and ideas as they pertain to scholarly elites until 1989, see: Charles Maier, The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity (Cambridge/London, 1988). Glaser updated his work as Deutsche Kultur, 1945-2000 (Munich/Vienna, 1997).

## **Continuities Of Democracy And Military Professionalism: The Political And Social Setting In The Beginning Of Debate, 1945-49**

These elements of continuity in the struggle to extract historical truth about the soldier in national socialism follow quite naturally from the evolution of military professionalism and from the consolidation of democracy in modern Europe. Such issues concern more than merely central Europe; however, as such historians as Klaus Juergen Mueller and Michael Geyer have suggested,<sup>10</sup> in the first half of the 20th century the failures of democracy, mass politics and the soldierly calling brought disastrous consequences for soldier and civilian alike. Thus, this story stands within the frame of 20th century civil-military relations as much as it does within contemporary German history. Germans have consistently used the unceasing debate about image of the Wehrmacht as a means to address more general civil-military issues in politics and society.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, any understanding of the legacy of the Wehrmacht in Federal Germany exists in connection with the evolution of Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung (mastery of the past) as a general political and social phenomenon amid the changing character of German democracy. The early phase of this phenomenon has recently been given an insightful treatment by Norbert Frei, who suggests that the founders of the early Federal Republic,

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<sup>10</sup> Klaus-Juergen Mueller, *Armee und Drittes Reich, 1933-1939* (Paderborn, 1989); Michael Geyer, "German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare, 1914-1945," in Peter Paret ed. *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 2d ed. (Princeton, 1986) pp. 527-597.

<sup>11</sup> These issues as they pertain to the era 1950-1986 are developed in this author's *Reforging the Iron Cross* (Princeton, 1988).

rather than simply tolerating a restoration of the worst of clapped-out Weimar functionaries and Nazi fellow travelers, sought to fashion a workable policy of democratic integration from the civil-military mistakes of 1918-45 and from the political and social exigencies of the moment.<sup>12</sup> One need only recall how Germany between 1919 and 1933 had suffered from catastrophic civil-military relations and the rise of ideological camps within the body politic that grew more balkanized and antagonistic as time passed. The effort after 1948 to correct the failings of the first republic by a policy of democratic inclusion emerged amid the stresses of the first years of the Cold War and sparked opposition and controversy from the outset among those who worried about a neo-Nazi and militarist revival. Under the eyes of the occupiers, the makers of policy in the young democracy in Bonn confronted a disastrous situation of physical ruin and general bitterness for which no easy answers seemed possible. The failure of republican forces after 1921 to raise an army-in-a-democracy stood as a warning that a failure to reconcile soldiers with the new Basic Law would surely have fatal consequences.<sup>13</sup>

The Federal Republic had to do several things at once with the millions of veterans of the Wehrmacht as concerned: a) their democratic integration; b) their enfranchisement in society; and c) the provision of social welfare that had been forbidden by the occupiers' doctrines of control. In the first instance, as Frei

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<sup>12</sup> Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, pp.25ff.

<sup>13</sup> For the political radicalization of veterans groups in the era 1919-1933, see, for instance, Volker Berghahn, *Der Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten* (Duesseldorf, 1966); James Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Bloomington/London, 1977).

notes, the government had to distance itself from the ongoing attempt by the victors to re-educate, to de-nazify and to punish millions of Germans, among whom were tens of thousands of professional soldiers. The occupiers' project to mount an educational and psychological reform directed at all younger Germans, as well as to purge millions of party members from public life and civil society had reached its climax in the general attempt to punish the worst perpetrators of the regime at the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal and its subsequent trials.<sup>14</sup> Soldiers figured prominently as defendants in these trials. Military officers received damnation, scorn, and reproach for the failures of the regime and for defeat in war; plainly such sentiments affected rather less the common soldier, who at the time might be thought to be as much as a victim of the regime as the actual political/racial victims themselves. The offensive strategy of de-militarization, de-nazification, de-cartelization and democratization and of collective guilt had generally passed the culminating point by the time the FRG was born in the spring of 1949. The broad sweep of such strategy called forth a wave of public resentment against the victors and against their methods that had worrisome dimensions. The radical right-wing literary figure of the Weimar period, Ernst von Salomon, whose novel of the early 1950s, *Der Fragebogen* represents but a notable literary example of this phenomenon.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, pp. 133ff.

## **Two Images Of The Wehrmacht In Politics And Society, 1949-55**

Thus emerged at the outset the two antagonistic images of the Wehrmacht, which simultaneously form central continuities within this process of historical examination: a) the Wehrmacht as a semi-criminal or criminal organization, replete with a highly compromised senior leadership and a suspect officers corps; on the other hand, there rose as a reaction to this image; b) the military as a reservoir of Prussian-German patriotic, soldierly professional virtues that in certain key aspects had not been wholly corrupted by the national socialist regime. Indeed, the army had, at a crucial moment, offered the most significant resistance to the Nazis possible in July 1944. While the foregoing surely contains elements of oversimplification, this bi-polarity is useful for analysis. The continuities associated with these conflicted images have endured in one form or another into the present.<sup>16</sup>

The image of the Wehrmacht as a semi-criminal organization forms the point of departure. From the outset in the years from 1945 until 1949, professional soldiers stood, singled out, alongside the party hacks, for having brought defeat to eighty million Germans after prolonging a needless war. Despite the propaganda of the defunct regime to the contrary, the vaunted professional genius of German soldiers seemed to fail them utterly after the

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<sup>15</sup> See the US translation of same as: Ernst von Salomon, *Der Fragebogen (Questionnaire)* (New York, 1955).

<sup>16</sup> These ideas are developed in this author's *Reforging the Iron Cross*, pp.11ff., which in turn, relies on Hans Speier, *German Rearmament and Atomic War* (Evanston/White Plains, 1957) which still repays reading. Useful on this account from the end of the 1990s is Wolfram Wette, "Das Bild der Wehrmacht

blush of victory had vanished in 1941. Similarly the cult of soldierly tradition with its antiquated adherence to semi-feudal ideals of obedience, had grown perverted in the hands of genocidal mass murders. To be sure, professional soldiers in this period reaped a more bitter harvest of opprobrium than did say, scientists, lawyers, professors, doctors, judges, artists, and clerics, although each of these social groups had made common cause with the national socialists and committed professional misdeeds and crimes, as well. Since national socialism had grossly inflated the traditional prestige of the soldier by means of an attempt early in the regime to erect the Third Reich upon the dual pillars of party and army, one might naturally expect a backlash against such policy. Six of the regime's twelve years had been during war-time in which the small cadre of officers who had sharpened their skills in the Reichswehr were dwarfed in the national socialist people-at-arms that the Wehrmacht became at the height of the war. The radicalizing vortex of total war either snuffed out or swallowed up the lives of ever more Germans. Once defeat was also total in 1944-45, professional soldiers formed an easy and logical target of the resentment, guilt, and anger of these millions. One should note, however, in all of this that there ceased to be a unitary, monolithic Wehrmacht, if such a thing ever existed at all. The experience of soldierly life, war, politics, and society varied among the millions affected so that one can only generalize about this institution, while, at the same time, taking into account numerous exceptions to such rules.

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Elite nach 1945," in Gerd Ueberschaer, ed. Hitler's Militaerische Elite, Vom Kriegsbeginn bis zum Weltkriegsende, Vol. II, pp. 293-308.



The consolidation of the contrarian image of the Wehrmacht as being something other than the damned of the Nuremberg prosecutors could only take hold slowly at first. While the strictures of demilitarization held sway, few voices of dissent against this doctrine were to be heard, save from the defendants at the Nuremberg trials and from their lawyers and from those accused of war crimes in Landsberg prison.<sup>17</sup> However, this silence in the face of the proscription of the Wehrmacht passed once the Cold War began to erode the imperatives of the Four “D’s” of occupation policy. Such was the case soon after the FRG came into being in the spring of 1949 and the eruption of war in Korea in the summer of 1950 worsened greatly the character of the Soviet-American antagonism.

Whereas the dictates of demilitarization had led to a general prohibition on all things military, the recognition by the Adenauer government and by the NATO allies in 1949-50 that they would presently need to arm the Federal Republic within some kind of European army led to a liberalization of this soldierly ban. Despite the vow that Germany should remain forever free of arms and armies, the congruent needs of German sovereignty and of alliance strategy required the armament of the Federal Republic in the face of general disbelief and hostility domestically and abroad.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For an example in the wake of the Nuremberg trials, see: Hans Laternser, Verteidigung deutscher Soldaten: Pladoyers vor Alliierten Gerichten (Bonn, 1950), also Wette, “Wehrmacht Elite,”; Frei, Vergangenheitspolitik, pp. 133ff.

<sup>18</sup> The best account of the armament of the Federal Republic and the first years of the new German military is found in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, eds. Anfaenge westdeutscher Sicherheitspolitik (Munich, 1982ff.) 4 vols. Also see this author’s Reforging the Iron Cross, pp.47ff. and the synoptic

Thus followed a phase wherein veterans groups sprang into existence, the political right re-emerged in Germany, a handful of ex-Wehrmacht officers planned for a German contribution to Euro-Atlantic defense amid pacifist hostility, and memoirists and military pamphleteers produced a flood of literature on the last war of varying quality and purpose. Herein did the contrarian answer to Nuremberg verdict and to re-education fully established itself from its sources in various quarters in German society. Like so much else in German politics, the diverse adherents to the contrarian image of the Wehrmacht pursued overlapping goals while being united in their desire to cleanse the tarnished escutcheon of the soldier. Those who have recently come to this problem would do well to keep this insight in mind.

In this connection, one can distinguish between: a) those who defended the military in the past war to secure their own pensions;<sup>19</sup> b) those who sought to reconstruct military professionalism on a democratic basis within the FRG and NATO;<sup>20</sup> and c) those who, as in dark times past, grasped at the catalogue of military virtues and soldierly honor to shield their own actions or misdeeds, as well as d) those who employed personalities and institutions of military professionalism and valor as a symbol of radical right-wing politics. Again, these categories might appear somewhat overdrawn for the sake of

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overview in: Hans-Martin Ottmer, Die Entwicklung deutscher Sicherheitspolitik und die Geschichte der Bundeswehr, 1945-1992 (Bonn/Herford, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Frei, Vergangenheitspolitik, pp. 69-99.

<sup>20</sup> Abenheim, Iron Cross, pp.47ff. On right-wing and radical right wing politics, see: Adolf M. Birke, Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Verfassung, Parlament, Parteien (Munich, 1997), pp.16ff; Rudolf Morsey, Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Entstehung und Entwicklung bis 1969 (Munich, 1987), pp.22ff, 173ff;

generalization, but such is necessary to differentiate how the image of the Wehrmacht has subsequently evolved over the past five decades.

The foregoing stands linked with a specific period of time that extends from the era of the Korean War (1950-53) until the rise of détente after the closing of the inner-German border and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1961-63). This period is also significant as concerns the character of the mastery of the past in the FRG. These years witnessed certain culpable ex-Nazis seizing upon the Adenauer government's policies of democratic inclusion to escape punishment within what the chancellor's critics condemned as either a restoration or a general ethical and moral amnesia about past violence. Such amnesia or numbness only began to give way with the stirrings of a more assertive, questioning German civil society in the ferment of the early 1960s.<sup>21</sup> Within this first phase, then, one should consider how German soldiers in service after 1955 dealt with their own legacy and had to make their way between the bi-polarities of the images of the Wehrmacht in the FRG until the middle 1960s.

### **Image Of The Wehrmacht In The Early Years Of The Bundeswehr: Cold War Caution, Inclusion And Contradiction, 1950-65**

The military founders of the Bundeswehr were without exception veterans of the Wehrmacht; moreover certain of these figures had served in the

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Uwe Backes, et al eds. *Politischer Extremismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Berlin/Frankfurt, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> On these themes within West German politics and society generally, see: Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Die Ära Adenauer, 1949-1957; 1957-1963* in *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, vols. 2 & 3, Theodor Eschenburg et al eds. (Munich, 1981).

old armies before 1918 and in the Reichswehr.<sup>22</sup> Their military biographies comprised great moments of military professionalism and the subsequent decadence and corruption of soldierly ideals in the maelstrom of mass politics, total warfare in the machine age and pseudo-scientific ethnic cleansing. They had participated in military deeds of enormous self-sacrifice and great soldierly skill and seen soldiers and civilians alike criminally abuse such sacrifice and expertise. Further, many leading civilian political figures of the Adenauer era, who took a strong hand in the construction of the new army, had likewise served in uniform, mostly in the era 1933-45, although some had done so earlier as was the case with the socialist Kurt Schumacher.

Once makers of policy applied this collective experience to the task of simultaneously building a durable democracy and an efficient army, the result became visible, one might argue, as a kind of synthesis between the contrary, conflicted images of the Wehrmacht that had emerged in the era 1944-50.<sup>23</sup> This synthesis was symbolized by the democratic civil-military reforms of the Basic Law (1954-57), by the body of laws affecting military service, and by the reformulation of the soldier's ideals of service, command, morale and obedience that after 1953 became known as *Innere Fuehrung*.<sup>24</sup> In the realm of the

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<sup>22</sup> Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp.47ff; also see Ulrich de Maiziere, *In der Pflicht: Lebensbericht eines deutschen Soldaten* (Herford/Bonn, 1989); Hans-Joachim Harder et al., *Tradition und Reform in den Aufbaujahren der Bundeswehr* (Herford/Bonn, 1985).

<sup>23</sup> Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp.88ff. For a skeptical view on this account, see Wette, "Wehrmacht-Elite," cited in note 16.

<sup>24</sup> Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp.88ff. See, also, Bundesministerium fuer Verteidigung (BMVg) eds. *Handbuch Innere Fuehrung: Hilfen zur Klaerung der Begriffe* (Bonn, 1957); Hans-Joachim Reeb, et al eds. *Innere Fuehrung von A-Z: Lexikon fuer militaerische Fuehrer* (Regensburg, 1991); BMVg, eds. *Zentrale Dienstvorschrift 10/1: Innere Fuehrung* (Bonn, 1993).

international system, the joining of new German combat power to the integrated military structure of NATO within the ranks of former opponents and new allies represented a departure from past strategy and military practice. The sum of these measures rejected the essence of the Wehrmacht in national socialism, even if critics at home and abroad believed in 1955 that NATO was hoisting Hitler's officers back into the saddle with all the evil that might portend. For their part, allied soldiers were quick to-forgive-and-forget. Such a policy was obvious in Dwight Eisenhower's statement of honor for the German soldier of 1951. He offered this declaration upon becoming Supreme Commander Allied Forces, Europe to neutralize the opposition to alliance with the West that remained among many ex-soldiers embittered over their social ostracism, re-education and the Nuremberg and Landsberg verdicts.<sup>25</sup>

The civil-military reforms and democratic fundamentals of the 1950s, which arose, in part, from the clash of images over the Wehrmacht legacy, have proven far more effective and durable than one might have expected at the time. Four decades ago, however, all of this reform seemed but tentative and incomplete, and, because of the pre-1945 experience of soldier and the state, to be prone to a disastrous ending as in the era 1929-33.

The new civil-military ideal of the citizen-in-uniform could not disavow wholly the military careers of those who stood to arms to defend the FRG within the ranks of NATO.<sup>26</sup> In addition to young men with no prior service, the first

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<sup>25</sup> Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp. 69-71.

<sup>26</sup> These ideas are generally drawn from this author's *Iron Cross*, pp. 105ff.

officers of the Bundeswehr, who entered service in 1955-58, contained a strong contingent of company and field-grade veterans of the Wehrmacht. The latter were acutely aware of their own military skill and self-sacrifice from 1939 to 1945. While the Bundeswehr emerged as an army-without-pathos and thus rejected the Wilhelmine and Nazi over-emphasis on symbols and ceremonies, soldiers still had a sense of their own honor and professional ethos despite all that had happened around them. The Nazis in particular had taken the cult of soldierly tradition that became a political force after 1918, to fresh extremes. These measures began with Joseph Goebbels' historical exaggeration and political manipulation of the 21 March 1933 opening of the Reichstag in Potsdam and ended in 1945 with the color extravaganza film of Prussian kamikaze virtues in *Kolberg*. Such excesses would have no place in the West German military, but practical curbs on the cult of tradition did prove difficult to carry into effect. Any honoring by the new army of the soldierly past would perhaps appear to critics of the Bundeswehr as signs of a militarist or neo-Nazi revival. At the same time, however, men-at-arms would naturally honor their fallen comrades, respect their former commanders, exemplify such sacrifice, and, most important, avoid the blanket condemnations of the soldierly ethos that until recently had been the norm.

In response to the question of lineage, honors and the maintenance of tradition with the Wehrmacht, the Reichswehr and the old armies, the leadership of the Bundeswehr adopted a policy of "wait and see" amid the general attempt

at democratic civil-military relations.<sup>27</sup> The chief concern of civilian and military proponents of change lay with the reformed institutions of command, morale and obedience, which had to solidify in the midst of a rapid, turbulent military build-up in the years of crisis from 1956 until 1963. Within high councils of the civil and military leadership, as well as among the legislative and academic advisors to the Ministry of Defense, figures thought about a declaratory policy on military tradition. The most intractable aspect of this issue remained the legacy of the Wehrmacht. Contradictions and frictions on this account constantly thrust forward amid the enduring clash of the two conflicted images of the soldier in national socialism described above. A statement of policy on military tradition only emerged many years later. At the same time, though, senior defense decision makers had to raise new troop units under the gaze of impatient NATO allies; further, they had to adjust their ideas about strategy to thermonuclear combat, while they survived the Cold War crises from 1956 until 1963 that allowed Germans but few options for survival and prosperity.

The policy on military tradition that slowly emerged in the beginning of the Bundeswehr filled the pantheon of the new army, such as it was, with the Prussian reformers of the era 1808-15, the men and women of the 20th of July 1944, and the common soldiers of the Wehrmacht. The latter were honorable because they fulfilled their duty to fight at the front out of patriotism and self-

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<sup>27</sup> Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp. 105-164.

sacrifice and because one could hardly have excluded them without devastating consequences for needs of policy and strategy.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, within the system of the Cold War, the Bundeswehr adopted an image of the Wehrmacht and soldierly tradition that accorded generally with overall political and social trends of the time, but which also contained obvious contradictions that became more problematic as events moved on. For instance, the deeds of the simple Landsers and of the anti-Hitler general staff officers in the headquarters of the Replacement Army and of Army Group Center seemed difficult to reconcile in fact. In its essence, however, such policy about the symbols, lineage, honors and traditions of the former German armies reflected the spirit of democratic inclusion and anti-Weimar-era enfranchisement that had marked the first Adenauer years. The decree on soldierly tradition published by the Ministry of Defense in the summer of 1965 fits this generalization with its exemplification of a catalogue of soldierly virtues and of the Prussian reformers and the figures of the 20th of July. Perhaps such policy was, in part, also beset by the amnesia that affected society at the time. This latter question assumed a growing importance as the nature of state, politics and society changed not only in West Germany but also within the Euro-Atlantic world.

### **The Negative Image Of The Wehrmacht Re-Emerges: Causes And Effects, 1963-82**

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<sup>28</sup> Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp. 165-224. Speier makes this point most clearly in his *Atomic War*, p.31.



From the vantage point of century's end, the forces, which transformed the subject at hand, were, in the main, already present in the waning years of the Adenauer cabinet (1959-63) and those of Ludwig Erhard (1963-66).<sup>29</sup> Such factors of mentality, politics, and society undermined the contrarian image of the Wehrmacht that arose in the years 1949-63 and, eventually, allowed for a revival, wholly or in part, of the image of semi-criminal Wehrmacht. The latter has become a dominant feature of debate on the subject from the middle 1970s until the end of the 1990s. In this regard, there exists also throughout this period a noteworthy connection between the image of contemporary history in Germany, international events and domestic political change.<sup>30</sup>

The international system passed in the 1960s from the worst of ideological, thermonuclear confrontation to the beginnings of those policies and events that finally ended the Cold War: the united strategy of deterrence and détente.<sup>31</sup> The consolidation of German democracy reached a stage in this decade where one could see that the republic would not likely suffer the fate of its predecessor. The social and political cleavages that had been so obvious from the end of the 19th century until 1933 became a thing of the past or got catapulted across the iron curtain into the German-German struggle over the ideal form of state and society. To be sure, the decade witnessed political and

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<sup>29</sup> Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp. 202ff. On the decline of the Adenauer regime and the change in society and mentality, see Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in der Ära Adenauer*, (Darmstadt, 1988) 2d ed., pp. 223- 250.

<sup>30</sup> Klaus Hildebrand, *Von Erhard zur Grossen Koalition, 1963-1969* (Stuttgart/Wiesbaden, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> Helga Haftendorn, *Sicherheit und Entspannung: Zur Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1955-1982* (Baden-Baden, 1986) 2d ed.

social stresses, especially in its latter half, but these phenomena differed in their essence and effect from those of thirty years earlier.

At the same time, a younger generation of Germans partook of the spirit of the age in the Euro-Atlantic realm and questioned authority on all fronts.<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon gained much energy from the political fatigue of the founders of 1949 and from the rise of the New Left in West Germany, a trend that began after the SPD abandoned Marxism and embraced Atlanticism at the start of the 1960s. Not the least subject of revolt against the old order lay in what one's parents had done in the years 1933-45 as well as in the first years of the FRG. In this regard, the role of the common man and woman in national socialism, and by implication that of the common soldier in the Wehrmacht likewise became the topic of debate. Thus did the policy of democratic inclusion circa 1948-53, which sought to refute the re-educators and the Nuremberg verdicts, eventually bow before a new, more powerful dynamism of German civil society that made an ever more acute, and focused *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (mastery of the past) an unceasing feature of contemporary political culture. In all the above, events outside of Germany routinely intermeshed with developments of society and ideas within the country.

The arrest in Argentina of ex-SS Obersturmbannführer (LTC) Adolf Eichmann and his subsequent trial in Israel (1960-62) returned to public

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<sup>32</sup> Hildebrand, *1963-1969*; Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp.227ff.

consciousness the mass murder of European Jewry in Hitler's New Order.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the public mind had repressed the re-educators' and de-nazifiers' film documentaries of the death camps and found its mental equilibrium with the legend that the allied bombings symbolized a crime just as heinous as Auschwitz. But now this collective memory slowly began to shake off public amnesia and became unhinged by the behavior of the man in the glass booth. Hannah Arendt's thesis of the banality of evil when applied to Eichmann's biography highlighted the fate of the rank and file in national socialism, a trend that only gathered force as time passed. The trial in Jerusalem was followed in 1964-65 by the debate in parliament about the statute of limitations for crimes committed under national socialism and by the trial of yet more Nazi rank and file in the guise of SS guard personnel from the Auschwitz camp, the largest trial of its kind in the FRG until then.

At the same time, the return of captured military records from the United States and the United Kingdom to Germany strengthened the interest of German language scholarship for the civil-military structures of Nazi Germany. Such historians as Klaus-Juergen Mueller and Manfred Messerschmidt corrected the tendentious image of the Wehrmacht in national socialism that had been offered by apologists, memoirists, military pamphleteers and nationalist politicians in

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<sup>33</sup> Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Die Aera Adenauer, 1957-1963*, pp.204-216; Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, 1963); Richard Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York, 1989).

the early 1950s.<sup>34</sup> The pioneering works of these men were followed in turn by scores of monographs and studies that uncovered a high degree of culpability on the part of the senior military leadership in the crimes of national socialism as well as the exploration of new vistas concerning the nature of ideological war in the machine age and the twisted road to Auschwitz. Yet, at first, this scholarship had little impact on the public mind and remained unnoticed.

Change during the middle and later 1960s in the international realm altered considerably popular understanding of contemporary history and the image of the soldier and the state in German democracy.<sup>35</sup> The new eastern policies of the Kurt-Georg Kiesinger and Wily Brandt cabinets brought relaxed tensions with the Warsaw Pact, which coincided with the steady disillusionment among the German left with the exemplary image of US state and society due to the Indo-China War. In all of this, the Bundeswehr formed a welcome target for criticism of the Bonn Republic and its tenets of capitalism, consumerism and nuclear Atlanticism. If the Cold War were on the wane, why then have an army at all? And, moreover, why maintain an army that was a knock-off of the murderous Americans, whose race wars in the cities of North America and air/land war against the Vietnamese now put the lie to years of re-education? Matters were made no easier by enduring strain in German civil-military relations that ebbed and flowed throughout the decade in abuses of recruits in a paratroop regiment (1963), fights over the role of parliamentary oversight (1964),

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<sup>34</sup> Klaus-Juergen Mueller, *Das Heer und Hitler: Armee und NS Regime* (Stuttgart, 1969); Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS Staat: Die Zeit der Indoktrination* (Hamburg, 1969).

procurement scandals (1966), tensions between senior ministerial figures and high-ranking generals (1966), and a series of civil-military battles over the theory and practice of Innere Fuehrung (1968-71). The image of the Wehrmacht as well as that of the Reichswehr was seldom more than a subsidiary issue during the late-1960s. However, in such events as the controversial speech of Army Vice Chief of Staff Hans-Hellmuth Grashey wherein he described Innere Fuehrung as but a “mask,” in the so-called Schnez Study (named for Army Chief of Staff Albert Schnez) which called for a reform of society to increase combat power, and in the series of conflicting semi-public statements about the image of the officer (“Lieutenant ‘70,” and “Captains of Unna”), the image of the Wehrmacht lay pretty close to the surface. These now forgotten incidents allowed critics to conclude that traditionalist Wehrmacht veterans in Bundeswehr uniform were marching toward right-wing veterans organizations in the hope of returning some of the aggressive elan and dash of the old army to the utilitarian, drab army-in-a-democracy.<sup>36</sup>

This description of politics, society, and civil-military relations forms a backdrop to the rise of the social liberal coalition at the end of the 1960s. The above factors also played a role in German civil-military relations in the 1970s. This decade formed the pivotal age between now and then, that is, between the mentality and world view that held sway forty years ago and that of today. From late-1976 until late-1982, then, the Cold War compromise about the

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<sup>35</sup> Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp.227ff.

<sup>36</sup> Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp.227-255.

Wehrmacht, that is, the contrarian view of the soldier in national socialism in West German society, came undone as the cold war itself moved into its final phases. Just as at end of the 1990s, when disputes of policy about world and national economy, society and ecology led to conflict in a socialist-led coalition, in a not dissimilar way socialists grappled with questions of statecraft, diplomacy, strategy and alliance policy in what proved to be the climactic epoch of the Cold War (1977-87).<sup>37</sup> The latter issues of policy concerning Germany's role in NATO strategy tore rifts in the ranks of the socialist government at the national and local level. This phenomenon eventually undid the policy on soldierly tradition of the Adenauer era while it also weakened the cabinet of Helmut Schmidt. The image of the Wehrmacht became ensnared in German civil-military relations which were rather more concerned with nuclear strategy in NATO than principally with the fate of an unreconstructed, highly decorated veteran.

The visit in the fall of 1976 of the Stuka ace Hans-Ulrich Rudel to a veterans association meeting at an air force base near Freiburg im Breisgau set off a debate about the role of the Wehrmacht that unfolded in the Bundeswehr, in the cabinet, in the Socialist Party, and among the Christian Democratic opposition.<sup>38</sup> In one form or another, this struggle lasted for six years, and might be said, in fact, never to have ceased at all. Critics of the maintenance of tradition in the Bundeswehr objected to all symbolic and personal connections with the

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<sup>37</sup> Haftendorn, *Sicherheit und Entspannung* pp.206-268; Jeffrey Herf, *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance and the Battle of the Euromissiles*, (New York, 1991).

Wehrmacht.<sup>39</sup> The willingness among makers of policy in the 1950s and early 1960s to allow certain continuities and contacts with the old armies gave way to a bureaucratic tendency to draw ever-sharper historical and ethical barriers to the world before 1945. The Rudel scandal and the following debate pitted such critics against a defensive minority, who were oriented to the mission of the soldier in combat, and who asserted that one should be able to honor soldierly bravery in abstraction from an army's political purpose. Such distinctions, which might have been palatable in the depths of the Cold War as a reaction against re-education and Nuremberg, now became ever less so to a civil society that saw contemporary history in a different light.

The end of the decade witnessed a boom of interest in the German past, a feature of civil society that had not been present in early years of the Federal Republic. To the surprise and perhaps dismay of some professors, historical exhibitions, publications and history-from-below projects spread across the West German landscape. As the 1970s ended, the past also rushed in the form of political strife at home and abroad. This combination of interest in history and political upheaval gave strength to critics of the Bundeswehr and put those who honored the memory of the Wehrmacht and its soldiers onto shaky political ground. Whatever its merits in fact, the scandal of 1979 about the wartime naval service of then Minister President of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Hans Georg Filbinger, appeared to highlight the brutalities of give-no-quarter discipline for the average

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<sup>38</sup> Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp.256ff.

<sup>39</sup> Abenheim, *Iron Cross*, pp.270ff.

Wehrmacht soldier once the war was lost. The broadcast in the same year of an American “mini-series” about the fate of victims and perpetrators of what now generally came to be called the “Holocaust,” galvanized public interest in this most aggressive and essential aspect of the Nazi regime. This television series thrust the “final solution” into the public mind to an extent far beyond the breach worked by Eichmann’s trial in the early 1960s. Here the evils of pseudo-scientific mass murder and ethnic cleansing have remained ever since within the general phenomenon of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Indeed, the last remnants of public amnesia gave way to heightened consciousness of repressed memories. Auschwitz presently became an omnipresent political symbol for more than merely the events that led the anti-Jewish boycott of 1933 to the Wannsee Conference of 1942 and beyond to the gas chambers and crematoria. A nuclear Auschwitz for all of Europe was in the offing because of a NATO strategy of armament with intermediate nuclear missiles. This image became an *idée fixe* of the German peace movement from 1979 until 1983, who, as in earlier phases, took aim at the image of the soldier in the Bundeswehr. In particular, the maintenance of tradition and its symbols and ceremonies came in for protest. In 1980-81, violent opponents of the socialist government and its foreign policy seized upon public swearings of the oath to advance their political goals via episodes of violence staged before the mass media.

The projectiles hurled at soldiers swearing their solemn oath on city squares demolished whatever was left of the contrarian image of the Wehrmacht



in the policy of the West German military. In response, the socialist government abandoned the policy on military tradition put forward a decade and a half earlier and proscribed symbolic and institutional links of any kind with the Wehrmacht. The 1982 guidelines on military tradition, which were among the final acts of socialist Hans Apel's defense ministry, brought a climax to the political struggle about the image of the Wehrmacht that broke out in late-1976 with the Rudel scandal. As such, the senior defense leadership junked earlier policy, whose origins lay in the first years of the Federal Republic and its new army. The debate circa 1976-82 was surely as much about German civil-military relations in the midst of the last Cold War missile crisis as it was about Rudel's biography and the swearing of the oath. At the same time, this struggle was also connected with the bi-polarities of pacifism and anti-military sentiment among socialists in conflict with the obligations of the Helmut Schmidt government to maintain Atlantic alliance solidarity and to take account of the needs of military professionalism in a democracy. The events of the early-1980s, however, were but a prelude to yet further incidents and debate that have continued to the close of the decade and the end of the century.<sup>40</sup>

### **Some Thoughts on the Image of the Wehrmacht in the 1990s**

In the year since, there unfolded further episodes wherein the semi-criminal nature of the leadership of the Wehrmacht or of its soldiers generally

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<sup>40</sup> Abenheim, Iron Cross, pp. 270-289.

became an issue: the 1985 controversy about President Ronald Reagan honoring Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS dead at Bitburg; the 1986-87 question of President Kurt Waldheim's service while an intelligence officer in the Balkans; the writings of the late- Professor Andreas Hillgruber about the defensive battles against the Red Army in the last stages of the war that became co-mingled with the controversial ideas of Ernst Nolte in the so-called "Historikerstreit." of 1986-88.<sup>41</sup> For anyone who had reflected on the foregoing, one found a familiar set of arguments pro and contra as regards the soldiers of the Wehrmacht, the nature of military professionalism, the limits of soldierly obedience, the honoring of martial virtues and the criminal acts of soldiers and national socialists.

In the interval, the world historical changes of the year 1989 have given new energy to this traditional debate of Federal German politics. Momentous alterations in politics and society naturally must increase interest in a literate public about the meaning of the past. The collapse of the Soviet system and the revival of actual war in Europe and nearby, in which organized violence for political ends of an especially brutal kind surprised and confused makers of policy, touched the German public mind very differently than did the events of fifty-five years ago. Germany must now come to grips with the experience of the German Democratic Republic as well as that of the Third Reich. One must do so as the waning years of the century have turned violent. This extraordinary series of events has coincided with a general trend in the western world to see the

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<sup>41</sup> Evans, *Hitler's Shadow*; Maier, *Unmasterable Past*.

Holocaust, as a far more central aspect of national socialism and the Second World War than had been the case in previous years. The enthusiastic popular reception in Germany of Stephen Spielberg's film of 1993 *Schindler's List* and of Daniel Goldhagen's volume of 1996 on German popular race hatred and the murder of Jews speaks to this trend.<sup>42</sup> The foregoing overshadowed debate as to why certain Bundeswehr barracks are named for former soldiers, who by modern criteria, have an unacceptable political reputation. Events in the Balkans and in the realm of memory dominated by Auschwitz also overwhelmed the discussions of 1994 and 1995 of how to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the 20 July 1944 attempt to kill Hitler and the fiftieth anniversary of war's end.

Daniel Goldhagen's reductionist thesis of a uniquely German form of anti-Jewish blood lust, with which this writer disagrees, relies chiefly on the murderous progress of para-military formations of the Ordnungspolizei (Order Police) seconded by the Reichsfuehrer SS to cleanse ethnically rear areas of the eastern front.<sup>43</sup> In part, just as much as Goldhagen uses the work of other scholars of the Holocaust, he also builds on a body of historical scholarship that has followed the lead of John Keegan to examine the face of battle from the soldier's perspective.<sup>44</sup> Historical evidence that underscores the effects of political indoctrination as well as the ideological contents of soldiers' letters have

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<sup>42</sup> Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996); a German discussion of Goldhagen's ideas is: Julius Schoeps, ed. *Ein Volk von Moerdern?* (Hamburg, 1996); a suggestive and useful critique of Goldhagen is Norman Finkelstein & Ruth Bettina Birn, *A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth* (New York, 1998).

<sup>43</sup> A useful treatment of the SS/police relationship is Friedrich Wilhelm, *Die Polizei im NS Staat* (Paderborn/Munich/Vienna, 1998).

further damaged the image soldier of the Wehrmacht that arose as a protest against re-education and the Nuremberg verdicts.<sup>45</sup> One might also observe that the search for the historical truth is poorly served when political pressure groups of any kind--particularly extremists--seize upon the soldier's honor as a political weapon. Such a move has often politicized soldiers and damaged their professional competence to the loss of all.

To be sure, the present debate also arises naturally from civil-military tensions in a united Germany, where German armed forces imbedded within a Euro-Atlantic framework face new tasks and missions quite different from the strategic world of the 1970s.<sup>46</sup> Just as events connected with diplomacy and strategy acted as a factor for and against the honor of the Wehrmacht and its soldiers in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, this dynamic is alive in the 1990s. The interpretation of the image of the Wehrmacht in the Bundeswehr now stands in the shadow of the Gulf War, the Somalian intervention, and the war in ex-Yugoslavia.<sup>47</sup> Discussion about war and soldiers leads one back to the

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<sup>44</sup> John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York, 1976).

<sup>45</sup> Bartov, *Hitler's Army*; further examinations of this fruitful set of sources are: Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington, 1995); Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten--nationalsozialistischer Krieg?* (Paderborn/ Munich/Vienna, 1998); Detlef Vogel & Wolfram Wette, eds. *Andere Helme--Andere Menschen?* (Essen, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> The impact of unification on the Bundeswehr as concerns the former East German military is analyzed in this writer's work cited in note 2; of further interest on the East German military is Klaus Naumann, ed. *NVA: Anspruch und Wirklichkeit* (Hamburg/Bonn/Berlin, 1996); a progress report on this subject and on the German role in the Bosnian Stabilization Force (SFOR) is: Han-Peter von Kirchbach, *Mit Herz und Hand: Soldaten zwischen Elbe und Oder* (Frankfurt/Main/Bonn 1998); the changes in German defense policy from 1989 until 1994 are visible in BMVg, eds. *Weissbuch zur Sicherheit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und zur Lage und Zukunft der Bundeswehr* (Bonn, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> A critical analysis of united Germany's greater role in extra-central European security is: Wolfgang Michal, *Deutschland und der naechste Krieg* (Berlin, 1995); an account of a uniting Germany in the Gulf War of 1990-1991 is: Michael J. Inacker, *Unter Ausschluss der Oeffentlichkeit: Die Deutschen in der Golf Allianz* (Bonn/Berlin, 1991); the view of the former Chief of Staff of the reform of the Bundeswehr in the

Wehrmacht in the Balkans and forward to the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia and the Kosovo Force in Kosovo. As such this knotted set of issues exists within a continuum, where those anxious about strategy and armies in a democracy use the past to speak of present tensions about the soldier and the state in Germany. Few seem to keep the foregoing insight in mind, however, because of the ignorance of how past and present events are connected in the history of ideas in their dimension present in democratic civil-military relations.

All public discussion about the image of the Wehrmacht, of which the exhibition on the crimes of the Wehrmacht is a noteworthy example, stands in this continuity of debate. This writer finds many of the arguments vital at the end of the present decade to be overdrawn; this being said, however, this subject has always tended toward extremes because of how debates about the past and the soldier in the state have generally had a polarizing effect in Germany. Such civil-military exchange has become the hallmark of a sound, effective German democracy in which *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* remains a controversial, but central feature. This most recent phase of contention surely has gained gravity from how the end of the Cold War era has accelerated the pace of political and social change in central Europe. The onset of the new era has thrown open to public scrutiny practically the whole record of mass politics, war in the machine

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1990s is: Klaus Naumann, *Die Bundeswehr in einer Welt im Umbruch* (Berlin, 1994); of further interest by, and for German soldiers, are these volumes on civil-military relations of the 1990s: Joachim Weber, ed. *Armee in Kreuzfeuer* (Munich, 1997); Heinz Karst, *Die Bundeswehr in der Krise* (Munich, 1997); Gerd Schultze-Rhondorf, *Wozu Noch Tapfer Sein?* (Graefeling, 1998); Domink A. Faust, *Vetrauenskrise in der Bundeswehr* (Graefeling, 1998), an insightful monograph on German security, defense and civil-military

age, and genocide in the 20th century. The sudden and unexpected unification of Germany and the reorganization of the European system of states have heightened and sharpened many of the trends and phenomena identified above in this essay. The sense that things are in flux gives greater urgency to the desire to understand the causes and effects of catastrophic events. Each generation will take the evidence of the past and re-arrange such material in a new, and, in this case, perhaps more critical light. Such a process is inevitable; plainly, German democracy would be a much worse place without such a phenomenon. Younger generations of Germans, wholly untouched by nearly all of what has been described here, are now free to reflect upon the perpetual dilemma of the soldier and politics represented by the studio portrait of a young recruit and by the snapshots he made of war's genocidal brutalities.

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relations as seldom offered by an American is: John Duffield, World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions and German Security Policy After Unification (Stanford, 1998).